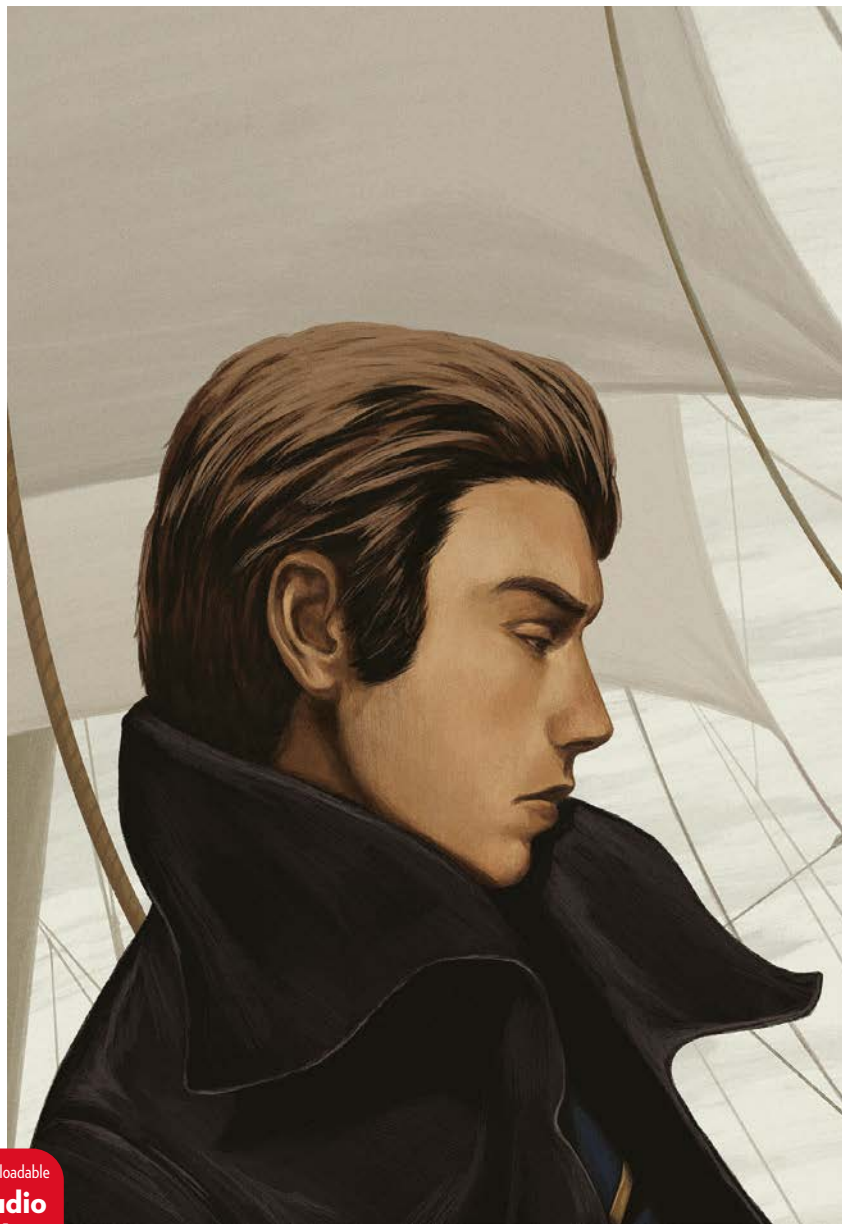




Joseph Conrad

THE SHADOW LINE



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Book brief

- 1 *The Shadow Line* by Joseph Conrad takes place in Asia during the Victorian era, at a time when goods were transported between the colonies on sailing ships and sometimes steamships.
- 2 The story takes place in the ports of Singapore and Bangkok, and on board a sailing ship in the Gulf of Siam.
- 3 It tells the story of a young man's experiences as a new captain on a sailing ship, during which time he passes the '*shadow line*', an imaginary boundary between youth and maturity. He realises that it is not age that makes a young man become an adult, but life experiences.
- 4 The young captain is the narrator of the book, who is neither named nor described in any way. The only thing we know about him is that he is young and European.
- 5 Youth versus maturity is the main theme of the book, but Conrad also touches briefly on the themes of madness and the supernatural.

Joseph Conrad

The Shadow Line

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For Review Only

Contents

6	Main Characters	
8	Before you Read	
10	Chapter 1	The Officers' Home
18	Activities	
20	Chapter 2	The Harbour Office
26	Activities	
28	Chapter 3	Steamship to Bangkok
32	Activities	
34	Chapter 4	My Ship!
42	Activities	
44	Chapter 5	My Hands Full
52	Activities	
54	Chapter 6	More Bad News
58	Activities	
60	Chapter 7	A Shocking Discovery
64	Activities	
66	Chapter 8	Still and Dark
72	Activities	
74	Chapter 9	The Storm
80	Activities	
82	Chapter 10	Back in Singapore
86	Activities	
88	Focus on...	Joseph Conrad
90	Focus on...	Themes in Conrad's novels
92	Focus on...	Trade in 19th century Asia
94	Test Yourself	
95	Syllabus	

Main Characters

The Narrator

The young captain of the sailing ship.

The Chief Steward

Ex sailor who manages the Officers' Home.

Captain Giles

An experienced sailor and kind, wise man who is staying in the Officers' Home.

Hamilton

An unpleasant sailor who stays at the Officers' Home while looking for work.



Captain Ellis

The Harbour Master responsible for managing the Harbour Office that gives jobs to the sailors.

Mr Burns

The ship's chief mate and second in command.

Ransome

The ship's cook.

The Doctor

The doctor in charge of the hospital in Bangkok.



Grammar

B2 FIRST

1 Complete the text with one word for each space.

The story (1) place in Asia in Victorian times and is about a young sailor (2) is finding it difficult to decide (3) he wants to do with his life. He decides that he wants to leave his job on a steamship and return (4) England, but then he is offered a command (5) board a sailing ship. He realises that being a captain is what he really wants to do. However, when he (6) to sail his ship from Bangkok to Singapore, he is faced with (7) difficulties during his voyage (8) sea. This experience changes him. He realises that he alone is responsible (9) his ship and his men. He knows that, as a result, he (10) crossed the line from youth into maturity.

Vocabulary

2 Match the words that mean the same.

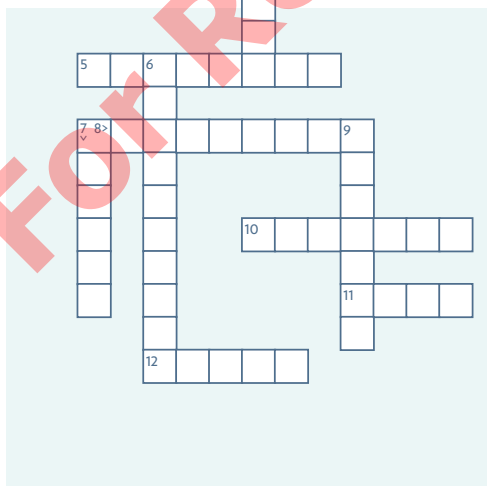
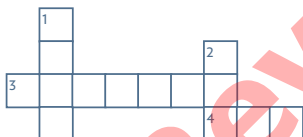
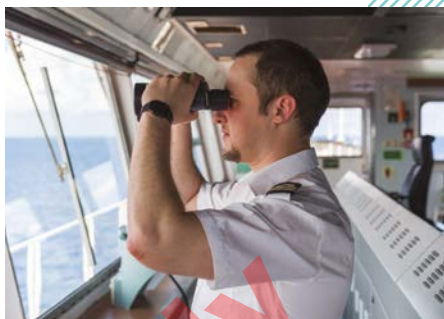
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| 1 ☐ sailor | a offend |
| 2 ☐ navigate | b boring |
| 3 ☐ insult | c port |
| 4 ☐ trouble | d sail |
| 5 ☐ dull | e problems |
| 6 ☐ harbour | f seaman |



3 Read the clues and complete the crossword.

Clues

- 1 Group of men who work on a ship.
- 2 Another word for 'seaman'.
- 3 Area where you can sit outside a house
- 4 Liquid inside a pen, used for writing.
- 5 The Queen who ruled Britain in the 19th century.
- 6 Africa, Asia and Europe are
- 7 A small river.
- 8 A small country in Asia.
- 9 Adjective used to describe countries in Asia.
- 10 The person in command of a ship.
- 11 Used to pull up a sail on a ship.
- 12 Bad weather: rain, thunder and lightning.



The Officers' Home

- ▶ 2 It is the privilege* of early youth to live in all the beautiful continuity of hope which knows no pauses* and no introspection*. Time goes on until one sees ahead a *shadow line* warning that youth must be left behind. But before that, there are moments when the still young will make careless decisions without thinking of the consequences. And this is what I did. For no reason, I gave up my job on a steamship. She was an Eastern ship, and I loved her and the crew* who worked on her. She had an Arab owner who was very loyal to the British Empire. And suddenly I left all this. I left it in the way a bird flies away from a comfortable branch. One day I was perfectly right and the next, everything was gone – interest, contentment, enjoyment – everything. It was one of these moments, you know. That period of late youth arrived and carried me off. Carried me off that ship, I mean.

Here there is the explanation of the title of the novel. The 'shadow line' is an invisible boundary that is crossed when a young person, through life experiences, becomes an adult.

Sailors often refer to ships as 'she', and talk about them as if they are female.

When I told Captain Kent I was leaving, he stared hard as if wondering what was wrong with me. But he was a sailor, and he too had been young at one time. Then, a smile appeared under his thick grey moustache, and he said that, of course, if I felt I must go, he couldn't keep me by force.

As I was going out of his cabin, he added, sadly, that he hoped

privilege advantage, the right
pause interval, break

introspection looking inside oneself
crew group of people who work on a ship

The Shadow Line

I would find what I was looking for. My shipmates* were not so understanding and I could not explain to them why, after 18 months on the ship, so full of new and different experiences, I felt I had to go.

The next day, the Captain and I met at the Harbour Office to sign the formal papers.

The official behind the desk smiled and asked, 'Sign off and on again?'

When my Captain replied, 'No. He leaves us to go home,' he nodded at me sadly. Then, he shook hands with me, gently, as if he felt sorry for me.

Both Captain Kent and the official think that the Narrator is making the wrong decision.

There was no ship I could take to return home for three or four days. Being now a man without a ship, I had become, in fact, just a passenger – it would have been more appropriate* perhaps if I had gone to stay in a hotel. And there it was, close to the Harbour Office, like a palace with white pillars and green grass around it. I would have felt a passenger indeed in there! I gave it an unpleasant look and headed towards the Officers' Home.

The Officers' Home was a large low building with a wide veranda and a little garden between it and the street. It was run by the Harbour Office and its manager had the official title of Chief Steward. He was an unhappy old man, possibly an ex sailor. It was obvious that at some time in his life, he had been connected with the sea and, most probably, had been a failure. I thought his job was a very easy one but he always said the opposite. Perhaps everything naturally was too much trouble for him. He certainly seemed to hate having people in the house. When I entered the building it was empty, except for a strange man sleeping in a chair, at the far end of the veranda.

shipmates colleagues/friends
on the ship

appropriate right, suitable

I knocked at a door with Chief Steward written on it and then heard a voice inside the room saying,

‘Oh, dear! Oh, dear! What is it now?’

I went in at once. It was a strange dark room, unusual for a warm Eastern country, with heavy furniture and boxes everywhere. He did not look happy when I said that I had come to stay, but he could not say that there were no rooms available.

‘It’s only for a couple of days,’ I said intending to cheer him up.

‘Perhaps you would like to pay immediately?’ he suggested.

‘Certainly not,’ I exclaimed angrily. ‘Never heard of such a thing!’

He held his head in his hands in despair*.

‘Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Don’t get angry. I am asking everybody. If you gentlemen all agreed to pay immediately, I could make Hamilton pay too. He always comes here with no money, or when he does have money, he still refuses to pay. He behaves very badly and says I can’t throw him out into the street. I don’t know what to do with him. So, if you only would ...’

I was amazed. I could not believe how rude he was. Of course, I refused and asked him to take me to my room immediately. He took a key and led me out of his room, giving me an evil look as he passed me.

‘Is there anyone I know staying here?’ I asked him before he left my room.

He informed me that Captain Giles was there, back from a sea trip. Two other guests were staying also. He paused. And, of course, Hamilton, he added.

‘Oh, yes! Hamilton,’ I said, and the miserable creature left with a final groan*.

The Narrator is showing his immaturity by reacting angrily to the Steward’s request.

despair unhappiness
groan sigh

I asked the Steward for a room.





I was still angry at the Steward's behaviour when I went to the dining room for afternoon tea. He was there on duty with the servants. The food was laid out at one end of a long wooden table and a fan* above it moved the hot air around the room.

There were four of us sitting at the table. One of them was the strange man I had seen sleeping on the veranda. The proud-looking person next to him, with a clean shaven face and sideburns was, of course, Hamilton. I had never seen anyone looking so superior-looking and arrogant, considering his position in life. I had been told that he thought of me as being inferior*. He raised his eyes at the sound I made pulling back my chair.

Captain Giles was at the head of the table. I greeted him and sat down on his left. Heavy and pale, with a shiny bald head and brown eyes, he looked nothing like a seaman. He appeared to be the kind of man who you could trust to give you good advice. Though very well-known and respected in the shipping world, he had no regular employment. He did not want it. He was an expert in navigation* and they said he knew more about the remote and unmapped* parts of these Eastern islands than any man living. He would take command of any ship that needed him. Captain Giles was as good as the best, if not a little better. But in Hamilton's view, he was an 'outsider'. I believed that Hamilton thought everyone, on some level, was an 'outsider'. I didn't try to make conversation with Captain Giles, whom I had not seen more than twice in my life. But, of course, he knew who I was. After a while, he spoke to me, asking me in a friendly way, if I was on leave. I told him that I had left my ship for good. 'A free man for a bit,' was his comment. When Hamilton heard us speaking, he got up,

Although he appears briefly in the novel, at the beginning and the end, Captain Giles is an important character who helps the Narrator a great deal.

This comment shows that Captain Giles is sure the Narrator will return to his job as a sailor.

fan 
inferior less important

navigation sailing
unmapped not on any
geographical map

The Shadow Line

saying something about the terrible heat taking away his appetite.

We heard him leave the house immediately. Captain Giles commented that Hamilton had probably gone to ask about my old job. The Chief Steward, who had been standing nearby, complaining about Hamilton's account* at the Officers' Home, said that he wished he would get his job. His face fell, however, when I told him that someone had already taken my job. Captain Giles laughed and we got up and went out on the veranda together.

The Narrator probably doesn't know this, but says it to annoy the Steward.

'Why did you leave your ship?' he asked me.

I suddenly became angry because I myself didn't really know, and replied loudly,

'Why ...? Do you disapprove?'

He said nothing and went to his room to rest.

I felt bad about the way I had spoken to Captain Giles so, at afternoon tea the next day, when he told me he had spoken to my old Captain, who had said he was sorry I had left his ship, I told him truthfully that I had certainly liked him more than any other captain I had sailed with.

The Narrator realises himself that it was probably a mistake to leave his ship.

'Haven't you heard, Captain Giles, that I intend to go home?' I asked.

'Yes,' he said kindly. 'I have heard that so often before.'

I was annoyed by his comment. Just then Hamilton came into the dining room, so I just muttered, 'Well, you shall see it done this time.'

Hamilton nodded at Captain Giles but didn't even look at me. When he spoke, it was only to tell the Steward that the food on his plate wasn't suitable for a gentleman. We left Hamilton at the table and went out to sit on the veranda to read the papers. They were old

account bill

This gives an idea of the time period. Queen Victoria celebrated her golden jubilee, 50 years as Queen of Great Britain, in June 1887. So, the story takes place after this date.

Hamilton shows that he feels superior to the Narrator.

The Narrator shows again his immaturity by getting angry at Captain Giles, who only wants to be nice to the young man.

and uninteresting, filled up mostly with dull descriptions of Queen Victoria's first jubilee* celebrations.

We would soon have fallen asleep in the heat of the tropical* afternoon, if we hadn't heard Hamilton's voice raised in the dining room. The Chief Steward was whispering to Hamilton, who then commented loudly.

'They will be glad enough to get a gentleman, I imagine. There is no hurry. One doesn't COMPETE with an outsider like that.'

'They're talking about you.' Captain Giles whispered to me. 'Very insulting. You haven't offended him in some way, have you?'

'I have never spoken to him in my life. He tried to get my job after I left, but didn't get it.'

'No, he didn't get it', Captain Giles repeated slowly. 'And not likely to either. Captain Kent is very sorry you left him. He says you are a good seaman*.'

I threw down my newspaper angrily. I wanted to know why he kept interfering in my private business.

'Don't be annoyed,' said Captain Giles quietly. 'You told me you intend to go home. Have you paid for your ticket yet?'

When I said that I was going to do it the next day, he said mysteriously, 'Well, then I think you ought to know there's something going on here.'

He then continued to tell me a tale* about a Harbour Office worker who had arrived that morning with an official letter for the Chief Steward, which was strange because he had already been to the Harbour Office that morning. Even stranger, he then rushed out of the house.

jubilee special anniversary
tropical in a hot, humid country

seaman sailor
tales stories

The Shadow Line

‘I think you should go and ask the Steward right now what was in that letter from the Harbour Office!’

Even to this day I don’t know what made me do it. I stopped the Steward as he was coming out of his room and demanded that he tell me about the letter.

He started saying, ‘You told me you were going home. So, I didn’t see why I should give you the message.’

His excuses* offended me. In that period I was in, between youth and maturity*, I was strangely sensitive* to someone insulting my intelligence. I am afraid that I treated the Steward very badly, until he began to cry and confess what he had done. I returned to Captain Giles.

A typical reaction of young people. The Narrator is aware of this.

‘You would never believe it,’ I cried. There’s a command* going about and he didn’t tell me!’

Captain Giles looked at his gold pocket watch and said, ‘Three o’clock. You’ll be in time.’

‘In time for what?’ I asked.

‘For the Harbour Office, of course! You have to do something about this.’

I didn’t think I should make trouble for the Steward. I wasn’t the right person for that. I wasn’t a permanent resident like Captain Giles, a man of a certain age and importance.

Captain Giles has become tired of the way the Narrator is acting. He is only trying to help the young man and give him the benefit of his experience.

‘You are strange,’ said Captain Giles impatiently. ‘Now you’ll tell me that a command is nothing to you – and after all the trouble I’ve taken too!’

As he turned away from me, annoyed at my hesitation, I realised he was right and that this command was what I was looking for. 

excuse explanation
maturity being an adult

sensitive delicate, easily offended
command (here) job as a captain on a ship



Reading

1 Decide if the following sentences about the Narrator are true or false.

- | | T | F |
|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 He hadn't liked working on the steamship. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2 He was an old man. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3 He wanted to go back home to England. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4 He preferred to stay in a hotel. | ☒ | ☐ |
| 5 He didn't like the Chief Steward at the Officers' Home. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6 He knew Captain Giles well. | ☒ | ☐ |
| 7 He was annoyed with Captain Giles' comments. | ☒ | ☐ |
| 8 He didn't confront the Steward about the letter. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 9 He wanted to cause trouble for the Steward. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 10 He realised he wanted to be a captain, after all. | ☐ | ☐ |

Grammar

2 Change the sentences from Direct to Indirect Speech.

'I'm leaving the ship,' I said to the Captain.

I told the Captain (that) I was leaving the ship.

1 'I will only stay for a couple of days,' I told the Steward.

2 'Could you pay in advance?' asked the Steward.

3 'Is there anyone I know staying here?' I asked the Steward.

4 'Where is the dining room?' I asked.

5 'Why did you leave your ship?' Captain Giles asked.

6 'Don't be annoyed,' Captain Giles told me.

7 'You are strange,' he said.

8 'Have you paid for your ticket yet?' he asked.

- 3** Read the text and use the words on the right to make a word that fits the gap on the same line.

The Officers' Home was a large low building with a
 (1) veranda. It was run by the Harbour
 Office and its (2) had the
 (3) title of Chief Steward. He was an
 (4) old man, possibly an ex sailor. It was
 obvious that at some time in his (5),
 he had been connected with the sea, and most probably,
 had been a (6) I thought his job was a
 very easy one but he always said the (7)
 . Perhaps everything (8) was too much
 trouble for him.

He (9) seemed to hate having people in
 the house. When I entered the (10), it was
 empty, except for a strange man sleeping in a chair, at the
 far end of the veranda.

WIDTH
MANAGE
OFFICE
HAPPINESS
LIVE

FAIL
OPPOSE
NATURE

CERTAIN
BUILD

Pre-Reading Activities • Chapter 2

Speaking

- 4 A** At the end of Chapter 1, the Narrator says that he realised that Captain Giles was right. What was he right about? What do you think happens in Chapter 2? Work in pairs and discuss. Decide if the following sentences are true or false.



- | | T | F |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 The Narrator goes to the Harbour Office the next day. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2 The Harbour Master is angry with the Narrator. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3 Captain Ellis has given Hamilton the job. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4 The Narrator doesn't want the job. | ☐ | ☐ |

T F
☐ ☐
☐ ☐
☐ ☐
☐ ☐

- 3** **4 B** Now listen to the start of Chapter 2 to see if you were right.